

Heinrich, A. (2012) Himmelseher, Birgit. Das Weimarer Hoftheater unter Goethes Leitung. Kunstanspruch und Kulturpolitik im Konflikt. *Theatre Research International*, 37 (3). pp. 285-286. ISSN 0307-8833

Copyright © 2012 Cambridge University Press

A copy can be downloaded for personal non-commercial research or study, without prior permission or charge

The content must not be changed in any way or reproduced in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holder(s)

When referring to this work, full bibliographic details must be given

<http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/73506>

Deposited on: 07 January 2013

Himmelseher, Birgit. *Das Weimarer Hoftheater unter Goethes Leitung. Kunstanspruch und Kulturpolitik im Konflikt*. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010. 311 pp. 79.95€ ISBN 978-3-11-023149-6.

Birgit Himmelseher book, a slightly revised version of her Munich PhD, deals with the Weimar court theatre under the directorship of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Himmelseher wants to examine the links between the Weimar playhouse and the theatre's patron, duke Carl August of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach. The time frame (1791 to 1817, therefore including the time of Napoleonic rule over Germany) is a valid one in connection with the particular focus of this study. The wider context the author is keen to discuss, i.e. the alleged signalling effect the Weimar theatre had for other German stages (p.5), however, is only touched upon. It may have been rewarding to discuss to what extent other theatres reflected the approaches taken by Goethe but the focus is almost entirely on the Weimar venture itself. More successfully Himmelseher discusses the crucial links between theatre and politics as exemplified in the person of Goethe himself – artistic director, playwright and senior politician at the same time. The author also successfully reflects new trends in historiography which have questioned the homogenous character of audiences at court theatres and re-evaluated the character of aristocratic patronage.

Himmelseher's investigation into Schiller's cooperation with Goethe and their concepts concerning a repertoire of educational drama is interesting but it would have been equally fascinating to see whether these ideas were ever popular with audiences. Goethe's ideal of a theatre pursuing active cultural politics as well

as exemplifying a particular and identifiable aesthetic could only go so far if audiences were much keener on a largely entertaining repertoire rather than the historical plays and classical drama he was developing with Schiller.

Much more convincing is chapter IV, which forms the biggest chunk of this study, and which is concerned with Goethe's theatrical work during the Napoleonic time. In looking at this under-researched area Himmelseher is able to show the various ways in which Goethe did not only negotiate and secure the theatre's continuing existence in a challenging climate but also use the playhouse's reputation to contribute to the survival of the small dukedom under French rule. Goethe had arranged himself – quite pragmatically – with Napoleon and after France's defeat he found it more difficult to carve out a political role for his theatre and his position in it. Himmelseher is able to show throughout this chapter how Goethe actively pursued cultural politics before the term was even coined.

Overall, and despite the claims put forward at the beginning, the book is a micro study rather than the big contextual work, which uses one case study to exemplify wider trends. As a study of the Weimar court theatre at a fascinating point in time, however, it largely succeeds not least due to the meticulous research and the considerable amount of primary material consulted.

Anselm Heinrich  
Theatre Studies  
University of Glasgow